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16TH DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

COMMITTEES:
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3816

April 9, 2002

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PLEASE RESPOND TO:

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The Honorable James F. Sensenbrenner
Chairman, Committee on Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Chabot
H-2362 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Sensenbrenner and Chairman Chabot:

I am writing to request that you schedule a markup of the Ten Commandments Defense Act, H.R. 3895, which gives states, counties and other local government entities the power to display the Ten Commandments on property they own or administer -- including public schools. This legislation is vital to protecting our religious liberty from the assault of overzealous judges and opponents of religious freedom.

In Chester County, where I live, we have experienced first-hand the effects of the absence of this legislation. Since 1920, the Ten Commandments have been displayed on the side of the Chester County Courthouse. The Ten Commandments have symbolized our commitment to the rule of law and served as the foundation of our Western legal system.

Recently, the display of the Ten Commandments has become a matter of dispute, which has lead to a legal challenge brought against Chester County by the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia. The Freethought Society has charged that the posting of the Ten Commandments violates the "separation of church and state." On March 6, 2002, U.S. District Judge Stewart Dalzell ordered that the plaque be removed from the County Courthouse. Although the County has appealed the decision, Judge Dalzell has ordered that the County cover the Ten Commandments plaque by April 22

This distressing turn of events in my own district clearly highlights the need for the Ten Commandments Defense Act. The First Amendment of the Constitution was never intended to prohibit the free exercise of religion or the display of religious symbols. That judges are increasingly willing to change the meaning of our Constitution to suit their own desires has become patently evident.

As you know, the Ten Commandments Defense Act has already passed the House as an amendment to the Juvenile Justice bill by a vote of 248 to 180 on June 17, 1999. As our situation in Chester County clearly shows, this legislation is still needed. The people of Chester County are gravely concerned by the court's order. Quick passage of the Ten Commandments Defense Act would send an important message to Chester County and to all Americans that our leaders still recognize this nation's heritage of law and faith.

Cordially



Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress